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## The House in Laurel Lane

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# The House in Laurel Lane

A Comedy in Two Acts

For Female Characters Only

By

GLADYS RUTH BRIDGHAM

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BOSTON

WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1920

# The House in Laurel Lane

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## CHARACTERS

JOSEPHINE ARNOLD	}	<i>Juniors,</i>
IRENE HUMPHRIES		
CLAUDIA WAINWRIGHT		
MARGUERITE HASTINGS	}	<i>Sophomores.</i>
ANICE WAINWRIGHT		
WILIFRED BLAKE		

## SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—Josephine and Irene's room—Lake View Seminary.  
An afternoon in May.

ACT II.—The house in Laurel Lane—evening of the same day.

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# The House in Laurel Lane

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## ACT I

### AFTERNOON

SCENE.—IRENE and JOSEPHINE'S room. *Exits R. and C. Study table with reading lamp, books, papers, etc., R. front. Couch with pillows left of C. exit; a tea-table, chairs, college flags on the walls and the fancy things that make the schoolgirls' room attractive.*

*(As curtain rises JOSEPHINE ARNOLD sits back of table consulting a slip of paper on the table before her; IRENE HUMPHRIES walks slowly down the room; she holds a slip of paper in her hand.)*

JOSEPHINE. Can you remember?

IRENE. I think so.

JOS. You must know so.

IRENE *(glances at the slip of paper in her hand; then lets her hand drop to her side)*. Try again!

JOS. *(consulting paper on table)*. If I sit quietly at this table?

IRENE. Talk quietly about Claudia in a sorrowful manner.

JOS. But if I get up and walk around?

IRENE. Get excited.

JOS. If I stand in front of desk?

IRENE. Strong on school spirit.

*(MARGUERITE HASTINGS comes to door, C.; looks in.)*

JOS. If I push a chair over?

IRENE. Strong on family and cousinly duty.

MARGUERITE (*coming forward*). What in the world are you girls talking about?

IRENE. We are getting ready for Anice.

MAR. You have sent for her?

JOS. Yes.

MAR. You are really going on with this?

JOS. Sure!

IRENE. We have arranged a series of signals.

JOS. It's going to be a delicate thing to handle, and ——

MAR. (*interrupting*). I should say as much!

JOS. We are afraid of bungling things, so I am going to do the thinking ——

IRENE. And I the talking. If I get off the track and don't seem to be getting the desired results, Joe will flash me a signal and I will change my line of conversation.

MAR. I take off my hat to you, Joe. You can think up the cleverest things of any girl I ever met, but I think you are going rather far this time.

JOS. Why? We are doing our duty, aren't we?

MAR. In a way, I suppose, but I would rather you would be the one to do it. I don't like to mix in family affairs.

IRENE. All the more interesting.

MAR. Hope you will find it so.

JOS. You are not going back on us, Rita?

MAR. You know very well I am not. I'll stand by you, but ——

(WILIFRED BLAKE *comes to door, c.*)

WILIFRED. Pardon me.

JOS. Come in, Miss Blake.

WIL. (*steps into room*). I gave Anice your message. She had to carry a theme down to Miss Lindsey's office. Then she will come directly over here.

JOS. Thank you very much.

WIL. You are quite welcome, Miss Arnold.

(*Withdraws.*)

MAR. (*looks worried*). Girls, do you really believe



you had better do this? Hadn't we better find some other way? Do you believe it is safe?

JOS. and IRENE (*together*). Safe?

MAR. Anice is so impulsive. If she goes to Claudia's rescue —

IRENE. If she goes? Isn't that just what we want her to do?

MAR. Nobody knows just how she will go about it or how far she will go.

JOS. Well, Rita, go as far as she will, there couldn't be any danger.

IRENE (*scornfully*). Of course not! I never heard anything so foolish.

MAR. (*impatiently*). Oh, all right! Go ahead!

JOS. (*stiffly*). We intend to.

IRENE. Oh, be a good sport, Rita, for goodness' sake!

MAR. (*suddenly changing her manner*). Very well. I'll be with you to the finish. Do you mind if I have the benefit of the coming séance?

IRENE. Not at all. (*Points R.*) Yonder room is at your disposal, fair lady.

MAR. Thanks. I will not interfere with your rehearsal. (*Takes a book from the table.*) Lend me your Latin. I will improve my time while I wait. [*Exit, R.*]

IRENE (*in a low tone*). No help from Rita.

JOS. We don't need any. We will carry this through ourselves.

(CLAUDIA WAINWRIGHT enters C., followed by ANICE WAINWRIGHT.)

CLAUDIA. Look who I found on the way! Little cousin!

ANICE. You sent for me, Miss Arnold?

JOS. Yes, I did, Anice. Sit down, Claudia!

CLAUD. Couldn't think of it, my dear! I have forty things to do in that many minutes.

IRENE. But you are on the committee for the Junior-Sophomore night, and you haven't made one suggestion about the affair yet.

CLAUD. There's lots of time.

JOS. There is not. We have appointed the sophomore committee and we have made Anice chairman.

ANICE (*delighted*). Really?

CLAUD. You have my unqualified approval. Bless you, my children.

IRENE. That won't do. Will you attend a committee meeting to-night?

CLAUD. Impossible!

JOS. Why is it?

CLAUD. I have an engagement.

IRENE. It will have to be a pretty important one to let you off this time.

CLAUD. It is important—very. I can't go into details but I couldn't possibly break it. (*Suddenly changing the subject.*) Girls! I have a Harvard junior coming on for the prom. Who wants a dance?

JOS. I admire your nerve.

CLAUD. Oh, pardon me! Who will be kind enough to dance with him?

JOS. (*smiling*). I might be able to squeeze out a dance for your friend.

CLAUD. So sweet of you! And you, love?

(*Turns to IRENE.*)

IRENE. Of course, you understand that it will be a terrible bore——

CLAUD. Certainly, but out of the goodness of your heart you will take pity on this poor young man——

IRENE (*interrupting*). That's it exactly, and if it will really please you I might be able to make it two dances instead of one.

CLAUD. Spoken like the noble child that you are!

(*Starts for door, c.*)

IRENE. Now don't go running off until you answer one or two questions at least.

CLAUD. See you later, love!

(*Throws her a kiss and runs out c.*)

JOS. Hopeless! We might as well go on with the arrangements without her. Do sit down, Anice.

*(Sits back of table facing IRENE.)*

IRENE *(quickly)*. Yes, do! We have something to tell you.

*(ANICE takes a chair C.; IRENE down L.)*

JOS. And we hardly know how to begin.

IRENE. Have—have you noticed anything odd about your cousin?

ANICE. About Claudia? Why, no. I don't think so.

IRENE *(glances nervously at JOS. and is at a loss as to what to say)*. Are you sure?

ANICE. Yes, quite sure! She seems just the same as usual to me. You really see more of her than I do.

JOS. Yes, I suppose we do. *(Gives IRENE a look.)*

IRENE *(pulling herself together for an effort)*. We have sent for you, Anice, because we are very much worried about Claudia and we don't know what to do.

ANICE *(surprised)*. Worried? Why? Is she ill?

IRENE. No, not ill. That is physically.

ANICE *(puzzled)*. Physically? *(Suddenly.)* You can't mean anything is the matter mentally. What do you mean?

IRENE. Did you ever hear Claudia express her views on socialism?

ANICE *(astonished)*. Good gracious, no!

IRENE. Your class didn't hear that lecture by Professor Orandaulf?

ANICE. No.

JOS. *(rises abruptly and walks about room)*. It's a pity you hadn't.

IRENE *(looks at JOS. for a second and then leans forward and becomes excited as she talks)*. It would be easier to make you understand. He spoke for and against socialism. He gave both sides. He was very fascinating. He actually hypnotized Claudia and one or two other girls. We believe he was here for a purpose.

ANICE. Please don't talk blindly. Tell me what you are driving at.

IRENE. How much do you know about socialists?

ANICE. Why, not much. They are awful bomb-throwing people. Reds, they call them.

IRENE. I suppose it would be hard to make you believe that perfectly nice people could get interested in them.

ANICE. Perfectly nice, perhaps—also perfectly insane.

Jos. (*sits by table again*). You call your cousin insane?

ANICE. I certainly should if she was interested in anything so wild, but it's no use telling me that Claudia Wainwright cares for anything but dances and—and—Harvard juniors. What's the joke?

IRENE (*taking cue from Jos., speaks quietly and seriously*). It is no joke, Anice. We were never more serious in our lives than we are now. How do you suppose it happens that Claudia has so many engagements that she doesn't care to tell about? Like to-night, for instance.

ANICE. Well, I suppose she doesn't have to tell every place she goes.

IRENE. No, she doesn't, but haven't you noticed that the girls usually do? (*ANICE is silent.*) Haven't you?

ANICE (*impatiently*). Well, yes, I suppose so, but ——— (*Stops abruptly.*) Oh, what in the world is it you mean? Where does she go? Why don't you talk to *her*?

Jos. (*rising and pushing a chair one side*). How can we talk to her?

IRENE (*struggling to remember the cue*). Er—yes,—how can we? (*Remembers suddenly.*) You are her cousin, a member of her family. Would you want to go on with something that is likely to lead to serious results?

ANICE. Of course not, but it's too absurd! (*Turns to Jos.*) Why, I could imagine you, Miss Arnold, knowing something about the subject, but not Claudia.

Jos. (*seriously*). You never can tell.

ANICE. Why, you both look and act as if this was a matter of life and death.

IRENE. Sometimes it is.

ANICE. What perfect nonsense!

IRENE. You wouldn't say that if you knew more about these people. Professor Orandaulf came here purposely to win over some of the girls.

ANICE (*shaking her head*). I'm from Missouri, Miss Humphries.

IRENE. Well, you will be shown all right if you let Claudia go on.

ANICE. If I let her go on? Supposing there is anything to what you say, do you think she would listen to me? It would do ten times the good for you or Miss Arnold to talk to her.

JOS. (*rising again and moving chair*). We don't think so. Claudia is hard to handle.

ANICE. You are right she is.

IRENE. This would be an affair for her family, not for outsiders.

JOS. (*stands in front of table*). She would very politely tell me to mind my own business. I'm sure of that.

IRENE. If you don't get the family point of view, Anice, you surely have school spirit enough to save one of the girls from a thing like this.

ANICE. If I believed in what you are saying I might — (*Stops abruptly*.) If this isn't a joke of some kind, tell me how much you really know and how much you are guessing at.

IRENE. We know that an organization of Reds has a meeting place somewhere around here, and we know that Claudia goes to the meetings.

ANICE. It isn't possible—not in this country. A girl like Claudia.

IRENE. Haven't you ever read in the papers where society girls and college boys have been arrested for having a part in their plots?

ANICE. Plots for what? College theatricals?

JOS. (*with a gesture of despair*). Well, of course, if we can't make you believe this is really so, I don't know what we can do.

ANICE. It's hard to believe that you are really serious,

but supposing you are, what is it to me? Claudia is older than I am, and I don't see why I should be called upon to interfere in her affairs. You mean all right and I thank you for telling me, but I feel positive that you have made a mistake. (*Takes a book from table.*) Good-bye.

[*Exit, c., leaving JOS. and IRENE staring at each other.*]

JOS. Well, what do you know about that?

IRENE. Did you ever?

MAR. (*appearing at door, r.*). Stung?

JOS. Looks like it! Why don't you go right on and say "I told you so"? You have my permission.

MAR. (*walking into room*). I don't see that I have the chance. This wasn't what I predicted. Frankly, I'm surprised. I thought Anice would be hard to convince, but once convinced I didn't think she would dodge her duty.

IRENE. Convinced? She wasn't convinced. I guess you didn't hear very well. She didn't believe us, and said even if she did that it wasn't any of her business. That Claudia was old enough to look out for herself.

MAR. (*looks thoughtfully from JOS. to IRENE*). Oh!

JOS. Come on down street! I have some errands to do and I'm cross and disgusted. The air will be good for me.

IRENE (*taking up a sweater*). All right.

MAR. May I stay here and study? Lucille has a committee meeting in our room and you can't hear yourself think.

IRENE. Sure!

JOS. Make yourself at home.

MAR. (*sitting by table*). Thanks.

IRENE. All ready, Joe?

JOS. Yes. (*IRENE exits, c.; JOS. starts to follow; turns back.*) It's mighty good of you, Rita, not to laugh at us.

MAR. I haven't seen anything to laugh at.

JOS. Almost any other girl would. [*Exit, c.*]

(MAR. *sits quite still for a second, suddenly opens her book, takes out a red card, reaches for a pen, writes*

*on card, reads what she has written, looks about thoughtfully; suddenly picks up a book on table.)*

MAR. (*with an exclamation of delight*). Anice's Geometry!

(*Opens ANICE's book; slips card in with edge showing.*)

ANICE (*outside*). Miss Arnold! (MAR. *places book on table in conspicuous place; exits, R.*; ANICE *enters, C.*) Miss Arnold, I —

(*Stops abruptly; looks about surprised; walks slowly down R. WIL. knocks at door, C. ANICE turns toward door as WIL. enters.*)

WIL. Oh, is it you, Anice? Are you here alone?

ANICE. Yes. I just came back for my Geometry. I carried off Claudia's by mistake. (*Places book on table; takes up her own book.*) This is mine.

WIL. I thought your cousin was here.

ANICE. She was here. She came up when I did, but she didn't stay.

WIL. I wonder where she is. I have a message for her.

ANICE (*quickly*). You have? (*Suddenly and determinedly.*) What is the message?

WIL. (*surprised*). Why, Anice!

ANICE. Oh, I know what you think—that it is nothing that concerns me. It does concern me. What is the message?

WIL. (*astonished at ANICE's manner*). Why, it can't concern you, Anice, but I don't see that it can do any harm to tell you what it is. Goodness knows it's vague enough. You know Jimmy Bean?

ANICE. Who works at the corner drug store?

WIL. Yes. He asked me if I knew Miss Claudia Wainwright. I told him yes. He said he couldn't find her and asked me to give her a message.

ANICE (*eagerly*). Yes!

WIL. No need of getting excited. The message was 6-5-4-8-0.

ANICE. Is that all?

WIL. Absolutely.

ANICE. A telephone number?

WIL. Certainly sounds like it.

ANICE. No exchange?

WIL. No.

ANICE. Then we can't trace it.

WIL. Well, Anice Wainwright! I must say ——

ANICE. Oh, I know you think it's strange and I can't explain.

WIL. Anice, what is the matter?

ANICE (*sitting by table*). It's no use to ask me.

WIL. (*going to her*). You are in trouble and you are just going to tell me.

ANICE. No, I can't. Don't ask me. It concerns some one else. (*Red card drops from her book to floor;*

WIL. *picks it up and hands it to her.*) What is it?

WIL. It dropped from your book.

ANICE (*surprised; takes the card*). Dropped from this book?

WIL. Yes, just now.

ANICE. That's strange. It isn't mine, and what's more, it must have been put in that book since I left it on the table here, for I was hunting for a slip of paper and I turned that book inside out looking for it.

WIL. You had your cousin's book. Perhaps some one thought that one was hers.

ANICE (*with a gasp*). The red card! That's just what they thought! Oh, what am I going to do? Claudia is the family pride!

WIL. What do you mean? Are you crazy?

ANICE (*examines the card*). Wil, does it look to you as if there was something written on this?

WIL. (*takes the card*). It's hard to tell on that red. Yes, there is! Something printed.

ANICE (*springs to her feet*). What?

WIL. The light isn't good. (*Goes to door, c.*) Try it here. A figure six and—T-h-e—the—house—i-n—in L-a-u-r-e-l Lane. The house in Laurel Lane. Have you any idea what that means?



ANICE (*slowly*). I believe I have. I'm not sure about the six unless it means the sixth house.

WIL. (*suddenly*). There was a six in the telephone number.

ANICE (*quickly*). That's right. What was that number?

WIL. 6-5-4-8-0.

ANICE (*slowly*). If the six in the number corresponds to this card? What can the rest be? 5-4-8-0. (*With a sudden cry.*) It's the time and date. May 4-8 o'clock. It's to-night! That's the meeting place! That is where she is going!

WIL. (*astonished*). What in the world do you mean?

ANICE. I wonder if I dare!

WIL. (*shaking her*). Dare to what? Anice Wainwright, you are driving me crazy!

ANICE. Will you come with me to-night to the house in Laurel Lane?

WIL. What for? What house?

ANICE. I don't know what house. (*Thoughtfully.*) There doesn't seem to be anything to indicate the house. Of course they know.

WIL. (*exasperated; at the top of her voice*). Who knows?

ANICE. Do you think there are any foreigners living in Laurel Lane?

WIL. Foreigners? I don't believe so. There are only a few cottages, you know, and that old Colonial house that is closed up!

ANICE. That's the place! Don't you see? It's the only house. The rest are cottages.

WIL. (*sarcastically*). Oh, yes. I see everything very clearly.

ANICE (*seriously*). Will you go with me to-night, Wil, to this house? I don't like to go alone. I can't tell you why we are going or what will happen when we get there, but if Claudia is going there I must go, too.

WIL. Well, this beats any mystery story I've read yet, but if you are in trouble, Anice, I'm game, no matter where you want to go.

ANICE (*throws her arms around WIL.*). Wil, you're a dear! You always are!

WIL. H'm! Maybe! I'm not so very brave. If you think there's ghosts or anything over there you had better take the smelling salts along.

ANICE (*puts the red card in CLAUD.'s book*). Will you find Claudia and give her this book? Be sure the red card is sticking out, and give her Jimmy Bean's message.

WIL. Sure! (*Takes the book.*) That's easy. Are you coming?

ANICE. Yes. I'll go up to my room. I've a lot to think over before night.

(*They exeunt, C. MAR. enters, R.; goes cautiously to door and looks after them, turns and walks down R. JOS. and IRENE enter, C.*)

MAR. (*very much excited*). Girls, she came back!

IRENE and JOS. (*together*). Who?

MAR. Anice. She did believe you. I laid a trap for her. It didn't work just as I thought it was going to, but it came around all right, and girls, she is going!

JOS. Going? When? Where? What are you talking about?

MAR. Anice. She is going to-night to the house in Laurel Lane!

## CURTAIN

## ACT II

### EVENING

SCENE.—*Room in the house in Laurel Lane. Large sliding or folding doors c. Exit L. and one R., supposed to be entrance to house. Window R. c.; old-fashioned sofa L. c.; stuffed chairs of an ancient date; circular table c., with red cover and an oil lamp; stage should be dimly lighted; on stage where it is possible moonlight effect through window would be best. There is a lighted candle on table.*

(JOS. and MAR. stand L. and R. of window; IRENE kneels by window looking cautiously out; JOS. is dressed and made up as an old lady; MAR. and IRENE wear black wigs and are dressed as foreigners.)

IRENE. Here they come!

MAR. Quick!

(*They leave window; IRENE takes candle from table.*)

JOS. (*tries doors c.*). These doors are bolted?

MAR. Yes. Everything is locked!

IRENE. I wonder what they will do.

(*They cross to door, L., and stand in a group in doorway; there is a slight pause; bell at door, R., rings; pause; knock at door.*)

WIL. (*outside*). Nobody home!

ANICE (*outside*). We will see if we can find a window that is unlocked.

JOS. (*excited*). Anice is going to try a window.

IRENE. Good for her! She is game, all right.

MAR. We had better go up-stairs. They may come around this side.

JOS. That's right!

*(They withdraw; ANICE appears at window; on stage where window is not possible, ANICE and WIL. may be heard talking out L. and make their entrance L.)*

ANICE *(opens window)*. All right! This one is unlocked. Give me a push! Then I'll pull you up.

WIL. All ready now—one—two—three!

ANICE *(climbs in window)*. All right. Now give me your hands. *(Leans out and helps WIL. in.)*

WIL. Agile as monkeys. I always knew we belonged in a zoo. Where do we go from here?

ANICE. This isn't a joke, Billy.

WIL. You refuse to tell me what it is, so it may as well be one for me.

ANICE *(looking about)*. I'm so glad we got here first.

WIL. Yes, it ought to bring us reserved seats at least.

ANICE *(looking at door, R.)*. That's the outside door. *(Tries door C.)* These doors are bolted. *(Opens door L. cautiously and looks out.)* And that's the hall and stairway.

WIL. This would be a swell place for a murder.

ANICE *(with a stifled cry)*. Billy!

WIL. It's a house with green shutters and we are at the foot of a circular staircase and behind the bolted doors!

ANICE. For goodness' sake, don't get me nervous! I must keep my nerve above all things.

WIL. Anice, you really ought to tell me something. It's ridiculous to keep me absolutely in the dark.

ANICE. Well, I'm going to watch for Claudia. If she comes to this house I must know why, whom she comes to see and what is going on. If what I have heard about Claudia is true she must be saved. I want you to remain in hiding. I will if I can.

WIL. You don't know who will be likely to be here besides Claudia?

ANICE. No.

WIL. What are you going to say if you meet any one?

ANICE. I asked old Bill, the gardener, this afternoon if any one lived here. He said he didn't think so now, but a short time ago an old lady, a fortune-teller, lived

here. If I meet any one I'll tell them I have come to have my fortune told.

WIL. You aren't absolutely sure that we are in the right house.

ANICE. Yes, I am. I have a feeling that this is the place.

WIL. Well, have you some other kind of a feeling as to where we are going to hide?

ANICE. I don't know. Probably in this room first if possible. (*Goes to door, L.*) This is where people enter.

WIL. (*with a chuckle*). I noticed it wasn't where we entered. How do you expect Claudia is going to get in if there is nobody home?

ANICE. Very likely she has a key if she is in the habit of coming here. Or she might come with some one who has a key. Or—or —

WIL. Or she might use an aeroplane and land on the roof and come down the chimney, or she might use a submarine and come up through the sink spout—or —

ANICE. Billy, will you be serious?

WIL. I simply can't. This is bound to be a joke until you prove it something else.

ANICE (*taking hold of sofa*). Let's pull this out. We can hide behind it, I think. (*WIL. helps her.*) Not too far!

WIL. Oh, don't worry. They won't be looking for visitors. (*Bell at door, R., rings three quick, short rings and two long, loud ones.*) Have a heart!

ANICE (*under her breath*). Claudia! A signal ring!

WIL. Must be some one in the house.

ANICE (*runs back of sofa*). Quick!

(*WIL. follows. IRENE opens door, L., cautiously, looks into room, enters, looks about room, discovers that sofa is moved out, laughs softly, crosses to door, R., opens it; CLAUD. enters.*)

IRENE. You come? (*Closes door and locks it.*)

CLAUD. Certainly I have come. Do I ever fail to answer the summons?

IRENE. Na.

CLAUD. Any one else here?

IRENE. Magrita and Francesca.

CLAUD. Tell them I am here.

IRENE. Ya. (*Starts to exit, L.*)

CLAUD. Any objection to a light here?

IRENE (*looking back*). Na. [*Exit, L.*

(*CLAUD. lights lamp on table, removes her coat and gloves; JOS. enters, L.; she walks with a cane and speaks in a soft, slow voice.*)

JOS. Good-evening, Miss Wainwright.

CLAUD. Good-evening, Magrita.

JOS. Sit down.

(*Sits at R. of center table; glances towards sofa; CLAUD. hesitates for a second; sits at L. of table.*)

CLAUD. What do you want of me?

JOS. Do you call that a polite way to speak, Miss Wainwright?

CLAUD. A lot you care about how I speak. What is it you want me to do?

JOS. My dear young lady!

CLAUD. Come to the point, please!

JOS. I wonder if you realize how fully you are one of us?

CLAUD. I am beginning to.

JOS. And what would happen if you betrayed our cause?

CLAUD. I am a very good guesser.

JOS. No guesswork!

CLAUD. Well, then, I know. A whole lot better than I wish I did.

JOS. What do you mean? You regret —

CLAUD. Nothing as yet. I am interested in what you want me to do. I am with the Reds heart and soul. I'm not in favor of some of the things you do. I believe I have told you that before.

JOS. You have. And I believe we have also told you that when your turn came—what?

CLAUD. I would have to go on. Well, I haven't refused, have I? Tell me what you want of me.

JOS. (*takes a piece of paper and writes a few words on it; passes it to CLAUD.*). Read!

CLAUD. (*reads paper; suddenly jumps to her feet; gives a stifled scream*). Oh!

JOS. Sit down!

(CLAUD. *drops back into chair.*)

CLAUD. Not that, Magrita!

JOS. You refuse?

CLAUD. I don't say that I do, but this isn't the regular thing. You should draw lots.

JOS. That is for us to decide.

CLAUD. I will do my duty, but I will not let you put a thing like this over on me.

JOS. You defy us?

CLAUD. I will not be fooled. I know we should draw lots for a thing like this.

JOS. How do you know we haven't?

CLAUD. I wasn't present.

JOS. You insinuate —

CLAUD. Nothing at all. I merely claim a right to draw my own lot.

JOS. (*rising abruptly*). Come up-stairs!

CLAUD. The others are here?

JOS. They are.

CLAUD. Nita said only Magrita and Francesca. I knew you were not playing fair.

JOS. (*impatently*). You will come?

CLAUD. Sure I will. I'm not afraid of any, or of all of you.

[*They exeunt, L.*]

(ANICE *comes from behind sofa.*)

WIL. (*following cautiously*). Have they gone?

ANICE. Yes.

(*Goes to door, L., opens it softly and looks out.*)

WIL. What in the world —

ANICE. Oh, isn't it terrible? It is really true.

WIL. What is? What on earth is going on? What were they driving at?

ANICE. Didn't you understand?

WIL. Well, not so you'd notice it.

ANICE. I thought you would guess. They are Reds.

WIL. (*puzzled*). Reds? (*Suddenly.*) Goodness gracious! You don't mean socialists?

ANICE. Yes. You know that awful old man that lectured? That was what he came for. To pull the girls in if he could find any who would be interested in him and his cause.

WIL. (*astounded*). And Claudia—Claudia Wainwright—is—is—crazy enough to—to—— (*Hesitates.*)

ANICE. Yes, she is!

WIL. (*staggered*). Well, words fail me!

ANICE. And you see how it is. They are forcing her to do some awful thing.

WIL. Looks that way. Say, Anice, this is a matter for the police. We can't handle it.

ANICE. But, Billy, don't you see, I can't notify the police without bringing Claudia into it? I must get her out some way.

WIL. (*slowly*). That's right, but how are you going to do it without the others raising a rumpus? Why, Anice, it's an awful mess! (*Beginning to grow nervous.*) The more you think about it the worse it grows. It's—it's overpowering.

ANICE. It surely is. Will you watch her while I try going up-stairs? I want to find out what they are trying to make Claudia do.

WIL. My goodness, Anice, your nerve is all with you.

ANICE. It needs to be. I hope you are convinced this isn't a joke.

WIL. Absolutely, and how on earth you can be so cool! My heart has come up in my mouth if any one should ask you. I told you I wasn't very courageous. Why didn't you invite some other girl to your party?

ANICE. I had rather have you.

WIL. I wouldn't have felt a bit slighted if you had left me out. My land! I have read things like this in the papers and seen them in the movies but I'm blessed if I ever yearned to have a part.



ANICE. You are all right, Billy. You'll stand by me to the end, no matter what it is. I couldn't say the same of any other girl I know.

WIL. Oh, Anice, this is no time for sentiment. My feet are beginning to chatter on the floor.

ANICE. There really isn't much danger, Billy. They won't dare to harm us. If we find out what they are up to we will have them in our power. I thought it all out this afternoon.

WIL. Well, you are a wonder! (CLAUD. gives a piercing scream outside; both girls stand still listening.) Anice, for the love of heaven!

ANICE. That sounded like Claudia! I'm going up-stairs! (Starts for door, L.)

WIL. For the love of Pete, don't stay too long! My nerve is oozing out through my very finger tips. (ANICE exits, L. WIL. stands listening for a second; sits down by table.) Good-night! (She looks fearfully around the room; looks towards door; listens; leans forward on table; hand comes in contact with slip of paper which JOS. handed to CLAUD.; picks it up; reads it.) Why what? (Reads it again.) Well, wouldn't that jar the walnuts on a chocolate college ice!

(She stands thinking for a second; suddenly goes to door, R.; opens it; exits, leaving it slightly open.)

IRENE enters, L. She looks about room; glances under sofa; goes to door, L.)

IRENE. They are not either of them here.

*Enter MAR., L.*

MAR. Anice went up-stairs alone.

IRENE. I wonder what has become of Billy.

MAR. I can't imagine. She certainly wasn't in the hall.

IRENE. Aren't they just playing up to us?

MAR. I should say they were! Their nerve is certainly all with them.

IRENE. We must try to locate Billy. Joe will be calling us down for not staying on duty.

(*They exeunt, L.; slight pause; ANICE enters, L.*)

ANICE (*softly*). Billy! Billy!

(*Looks about room and under sofa; goes back to door, L.; starts to open it; jumps back and stands back of door as Jos. opens it and enters; she tries to slip out of room but Jos. turns and sees her.*)

Jos. Well, young lady! What were you doing behind that door?

ANICE (*boldly*). Hiding.

Jos. Very evident. And why, if I may ask?

ANICE. Well, I wanted to see without being seen. I wasn't sure who was in the house.

Jos. Are you in the habit of entering houses without being asked?

ANICE. I rang the bell and knocked and no one answered. I thought perhaps people who came here were supposed to walk right in.

Jos. I don't understand.

ANICE. I never went anywhere on the same kind of an errand before.

Jos. What have you come for?

ANICE. To have my fortune told.

Jos. Indeed? By whom?

ANICE. Why, you, I suppose. I was told a fortune-teller lived here.

Jos. Very well. Sit down. (*She sits at table; ANICE sits opposite.*) Let me see your hand. H'm! Long life—early marriage—long voyages. You are naturally brave—loyal to your friends. You think strongly of duty but—but—you—you—young woman—(*suddenly leans across table and holds ANICE by the wrist*)—you lied to me. You didn't come here to have your fortune told. What did you come for?

ANICE. Let go of my wrist!

Jos. (*calling*). Francesca! Nita!

*Enter IRENE and MAR., L.*

ANICE (*struggling with Jos.*). Let me go, I say! What do you think you are doing?

MAR. What is the trouble?

(IRENE goes to the other side of ANICE; ANICE stops struggling.)

JOS. This young woman! She pretends she came to have her fortune told. It is not so.

IRENE. Spy?

JOS. I believe so.

MAR. What shall we do with her?

JOS. (to ANICE). You see? There are many of us here? You cannot go unless we say the word. Who are you? Why did you come? Who sent you?

ANICE. I am Anice Wainwright from the Seminary. No one sent me. I came of my own volition.

JOS. What did you come for?

ANICE. I told you. To have my fortune told.

MAR. If that is the case why did you bring another with you?

ANICE. If I brought another, where is she?

JOS. (giving her a pull towards the door). In the place where we are going to take you.

ANICE. I warn you to let me go unless you want the whole village after you.

JOS. Bring her along! (JOS. and IRENE pull her towards door, L. ANICE gives a sudden scream and pretends to faint.) Look out!

IRENE. Good heaven! She has fainted!

(Holds ANICE in her arms.)

JOS. Let her down easy!

(They place ANICE on the sofa.)

MAR. (indignantly). No wonder! Any girl would faint! It's ridiculous! I told you this thing was going too far!

JOS. Get some water.

(IRENE starts for door; bell rings three—then two.)

MAR. (startled). Who's that?

IRENE (*turning back*). It can't be any of our girls.

JOS. Every one is here.

MAR. Shall I answer?

*Enter WIL.*

JOS. Well, what do you want, young woman? (*Turns to IRENE.*) Nita, how does it happen that door is open?

IRENE (*uncertainly; stepping towards door*). I didn't lock it——

WIL. It won't do you any good now, my friend. The house is surrounded.

ALL. Surrounded?

WIL. Yes. The town constable! The gardener from the Seminary! The clerk from the hotel! The night watchman from the bank!

IRENE. Merciful heaven!

WIL. (*suddenly catching sight of ANICE on sofa*). Oh, what has happened? What is the matter with Anice?

MAR. (*firmly*). It is time this thing came to an end.

ANICE (*suddenly sitting up straight*). Yes, that's what I think.

IRENE. Good gracious! She hasn't fainted at all.

ANICE. No, I was just gaining time.

JOS. Well, if you aren't the limit!

ANICE. I have recognized your voices, Miss Arnold—Miss Humphries—Miss Hastings. What on earth does this mean?

JOS. (*to WIL.*). Is it true you have this house surrounded?

WIL. (*laughing*). Of course not! I was just turning tables. I found this slip of paper on the table. You told Claudia there was an audience under the sofa and to act as if the situation was desperate, so I knew it was a joke of some kind.

JOS. Then I will tell you. It means—it means that you have both passed a test and you are the very newest members of the Red Hearts.

(*IRENE and MAR. open the double doors, revealing a table set for a supper—red decorations, candles with*

*red shades, a group of girls around the table in red costumes, CLAUD. at the head of the table. WIL. and ANICE gasp and the girls all laugh and applaud.)*

WIL. Well—what ——

ANICE. But—and—gracious! I do feel faint now.

CLAUD. (*coming forward*). It's Anice, isn't it? And Billy! I guessed as much.

ANICE. And this was all planned?

MAR. Every bit of it. Miss Arnold's idea. I'll admit I didn't have much faith, but I take off my hat to every one now.

IRENE. I take mine off to the candidates. No one has ever stood a harder test than they have.

WIL. Well, I'm absolutely speechless.

CLAUD. (*to WIL.*). We didn't expect to catch you in the same trap with Anice. She unconsciously saved me a lot of trouble. Your name was next to hers and I was to plan your test.

ANICE. And you knew what was going on all the time?

CLAUD. No, I didn't. Only just a very little. That is one of the most fascinating things about the Red Hearts. We always answer a summons from a member and follow directions without knowing what the idea is or which candidate is being tried.

JOS. To be a Red Heart you must prove yourself brave, loyal to the school and true to your friends. You have answered our call and we welcome you to our midst. (*The girls all come forward and shake hands with ANICE and WIL.*) And now let the band play!

*(A program of songs, dances, recitations and so forth is introduced. At the close the girls lead ANICE and WIL. to the table and drink a toast to them as the curtain falls.)*

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